



Air Combat Command NEWS SERVICE

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Dyess B-1 pilot has part in 'The Patriot'

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DYESS AIR FORCE BASE, Texas (ACCNS) -- Clutching an American flag, Francis Martin rides into a formation of the Colonial Army, leading them towards an epic battle against the British redcoats. The troops cheer his return knowing victory is at hand.

As the formation advances for the 20th time that day, someone yells "Cut!"

A veteran of 11 years in the service, you might think that B-1 pilot Capt. Bob Tiedemann would get enough of military life and uniforms at work.

But he spent two weeks of leave in Rock Hill, S.C., playing a member of the Colonial Cavalry for the recently released film "The Patriot" starring Mel Gibson last November.

The pilot is a member of a local reenactor organization that portrays the 5th Texas Cavalry. Tiedemann normally serves as a Civil War soldier or a member of U.S. Cavalry unit that fought in the Indian Wars of 1850-80s.

The group regularly performs at Fort Concho at San Angelo, Fort Griffin, and other sites around Texas.

However late last year, the group was contacted by the film's producers looking for volunteers to re-fight the American Revolution. So Tiedemann and four other area reenactors packed up their horses and headed east to fight the Revolutionary War. Of the group, two were colonials, two were British Dragoons and another played a British general. The members brought their own horses and saddles but were costumed by the film company.

"I didn't get to keep the costume, but I was able to keep a button and wardrobe ticket as a souvenir," Tiedemann said.

A relative newcomer to the hobby of recreating past military units, Tiedemann began reenacting while stationed at Ellsworth AFB, S.D., three years ago. This was his first brush with the Hollywood glamour.

"I was told that during the filming of "Gettysburg" a few years ago, producers found it was better to use reenactors because they were already trained in military tactics and movements. It saved time and money over training extras." A total of 75 cavalry and 300 infantry reenactors were used in the films battle scenes in "The Patriot."

One thing he learned was time is money and both are tightly controlled on the film set.

"On a film set, the director is the dictator, he decided when we would start and end filming and what we'd do and where we'd go. He was the ultimate decision maker."

To save on hotel bills and to look after his quarter horse "Doc", he camped in his horse trailer at the film location. It also saved time getting to work in the morning. On a typical day he'd awaken at 3:30 a.m., line-up for breakfast at 4 a.m., have wardrobe and makeup at 4:30 a.m., and shooting began at first light. Filming lasted all morning, with a break for an hour lunch, and then continue until 5 p.m. Night filming lasted well into the evening hours.

During the complex battle scenes, each shot required 12 to 15 takes to allow for different camera angles and for the various actors to say their lines.

"It's monotonous and very time consuming. Everything is controlled, they know what they are looking for ... they want you to put their ideas on film. It's one thing to be there at filming, but another to see the final product. Seeing the scenes and battles pieced together really fulfilled the experience," he said.

Despite the long hours, Tiedemann said he feels it was a good experience. "They (the producers) were good to work with, and were very pleased with the military bearing displayed by the reenactors," he said.

During the whole experience Tiedemann was able to have a brief encounter with Mel Gibson.

"I got to meet Mel once, I actually bumped into him at the lunch line. We didn't have a real conversation, but he seemed very personable, Tiedemann said. "He acts a lot like his character in the "Lethal Weapon" films... always ready with a quick comment or joke. He even bought evening refreshments after shooting the final scene that took an entire day to film.

"During dinner that night they gave us a special screening of completed scenes," he said.

Tiedman isn't going to give up his day job for the riches of Hollywood. "There is no scene where you can tell it's me in front of the camera," he said. But he feels his leave was well spent.

"You do something like this for the experience, not the money. After transporting my horse and myself out there, plus buying a correct style saddle, the money I earned just covered the expenses," he said.

Tiedemann concluded that he would work on a major motion picture again.

"I've been asked to go to Austin to help film a movie about Jesse James, but I'm too busy to go. But film work is definitely something I'll do again," said the pilot.

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